

# **New Mexico Natural Resources Conservation 2000 Report**





Dear New Mexicans,

I proudly present this 2000 annual report to you, the shareholders of our state's natural resources. New Mexico's private landowners continue to respond to the natural resources challenges facing them. Each year, gains in conservation take us closer to our goal of maintaining a productive land in harmony with a quality environment.

These strides are made because of landowner commitment coupled with assistance from a broadbased Conservation Partnership consisting of NRCS, the State Soil and Water Conservation Commission, the New Mexico Association of Conservation Districts, New Mexico Association of Conservation District Employees, New Mexico Department of Agriculture, and the New Mexico Association of Resource Conservation and Development Councils. The Partnership has reaffirmed its commitment to locally led conservation as one of the most effective ways to help individual landowners and communities achieve their conservation goals through a voluntary, incentive-based approach to land stewardship.

This has been a banner year in resource conservation, but there is still much to be accomplished. I invite you to read this report and determine your role in conserving New Mexico's natural resources.

Many thanks to the NRCS employees, Conservation Partnership members, and private landowners who are dedicated to this work that is so vital to all New Mexicans.

Sincerely,



ROSENDO TREVINO III  
State Conservationist

## A Partnership for Good Stewardship

Terry Cone (right, cover photo) farms a little over 500 acres of corn, peanuts, wheat, and watermelons in the Irrigated Cropland, Curry and Roosevelt Counties Geographic Priority Area in eastern New Mexico. Because the area is semi-arid and depends on the declining Ogallala Aquifer, area producers are open to innovative techniques and programs to make the best use of water resources.

Cone has coupled the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and a unique low-interest loan program offered by the Roosevelt County Electric Cooperative and the Roosevelt Soil and Water Conservation District using Interstate Streams Commission funding. He converted three center pivot sprinkler systems to Low Energy Precision Application (LEPA) systems. Since conversion, he has increased irrigation efficiency from 60 percent to 90 percent and is saving ten acre-

inches of water per acre. With LEPA, irrigation water is applied near the root zone, so little of it is lost to evaporation.

Geographic Priority Areas



"The biggest benefit to us is being able to grow the same crops we used to grow eight to 10 years ago, and we're using only half of the water we used back then," said Mike Cone, who farms with his father, Terry. "We had to abandon corn for the last few years, because we just couldn't water it enough. Water is at a premium here, and we were losing 30 to 40 percent of it to evaporation with a conventional system."

Terry said, "This program may not be a cure-all for our water problems, but it sure helps our operation, and it helps the Ogallala, too." The next step is to reduce fertilizer use by running the chemicals through the precision application irrigation system.

**NRCS** employees serve all 33 New Mexico counties from 36 field offices across the State. Staffs are made up of range conservationists, soil conservationists, engineers, biologists, agronomists, and soil scientists who work hand-in-hand with land users to conserve natural resources on private lands. In addition, over 3,000 volunteers provided nearly 28,000 hours of assistance in 2000, mostly in fire recovery efforts last summer.

## Program Summary

This annual report covers one fiscal year, from October 1, 1999 to September 30, 2000. In a few cases, to show trends, data from other years is included. NRCS provides the technical assistance to all 1996 Federal Agriculture Improvement and Reform Act (1996 Farm Bill). In addition, many soil and water conservation districts often look to NRCS technical assistance for their conservation cost-share programs. The following are highlights of our annual activities:

### Small Watershed Program

The Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act of 1954, Public Law 83-566 (Small Watershed Program) provides broad authority to USDA agencies and to other Federal and state agencies to cooperate in watershed planning, surveys, and investigations. NRCS works with soil and water conservation districts and other local entities who serve as the local sponsors on watershed projects.

NRCS uses the Small Watershed Program to map flood hazard areas, reduce local flooding problems, develop guidelines for erosion control and runoff management, help landowners control erosion in high priority watersheds, and improve water quality to water bodies and groundwater.

A construction contract for Phase 1 of the T or C, Site 3C and Floodwater Diversion 2 Flood Control Project was let late in the fiscal year. Construction is currently 50 percent complete. The three phases of the project are projected for completion in 2002 at an estimated cost of nearly \$7.5 million.

Construction of repairs to the Santa Cruz, Site 3 floodwater regulating dam near Espanola was completed in July 2000.

### Soil Surveys

Twelve soil surveys in New Mexico are SSURGO certified, meeting all standards and specifications as described in the NRCS National Soil Survey Handbook. By next year, NRCS plans to have digital soil survey information for over half of the State's land area.

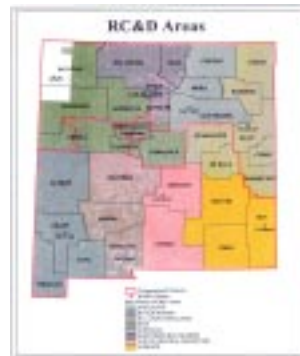
Final mapping in McKinley County last summer marked the completion of the soil surveys of areas dominated by

private lands. Cooperative efforts with other agencies and the pueblos and tribes have resulted in soil maps for almost all of the public and private land in the State. Updates of older surveys are underway in Santa Fe and Roosevelt Counties. Several additional areas are under consideration for updates.

## Resource Conservation & Development Program (RC&D)

America's national and community leaders are aware that the best solutions to economic, environmental, and social conditions come from within a community. The RC&D program is the ideal vehicle to promote this concept.

A local council of citizens sets their own priorities in each of eight RC&D Areas in the State. All of the Councils in New Mexico are 501(c)3, nonprofit organizations. This designation allows each Council to independently tap into nontraditional sources of funding from private foundations and corporations. In past years, RC&D Councils have been able to leverage funding at a ratio of \$1 to \$14.



### Plant Materials Program

The Los Lunas Plant Materials Center is one of a national network of plant research centers dedicated to providing vegetative solutions to conservation problems. One new plant, a penstemon, was released in 2000. It is useful for reclamation of dryland sites and for xeriscaping. This plant brings the total releases from the Center to 38.

### Private Grazing Land Assistance

NRCS conservationists help farmers and ranchers improve range and pasture conditions by managing for forage improvement, weed and brush control, erosion control, and revegetation.

The Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative is a partnership with landowners and other organizations to help expand the voluntary management of private grazing lands.

In 2000, nearly 1,960 people took part in 56 grazing land presentations. Another 120 landowners or managers received training in grazing land management techniques. And, there are 38 active demonstration projects on grazing lands in the State. Over 1.4 million acres are now in planned grazing systems.



## Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP)

The EWP, administered by NRCS, provides technical and financial assistance to safeguard people and property following natural disasters such as floods, fires, and drought.

The agency mobilized its resources, partners, and volunteers to help rehabilitate the nearly 20,000 acres of nonfederal lands affected by last summer's six major wildfire - the Cerro Grande, Cree, Scott Able, Manuelitas, Viveash, and La Cueva. Over \$3.4 million dollars in technical and financial assistance provided for extensive erosion control and flood prevention measures.

The EWP was also tapped for emergency response to flooding problems in the Truth or Consequences, Deming, and Silver City areas.

New Mexico was one of only four states in the Nation to receive funding through EWP for pilot watershed rehabilitation projects. We received \$2 million to provide technical and financial assistance to local sponsors to upgrade their flood control dams to today's more stringent dam safety criteria and standards. Work is progressing on the priority watershed projects: Hackberry (Eddy County), Santa Cruz (Rio Arriba and Santa Fe Counties), and Dona Ana (Dona Ana County.)

## Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

Hundreds of conservation practices, including non-cost-shared management practices, are being installed each year, with an emphasis on rangeland and cropland improvements. Applications and requests for funds continue to far exceed the available budget. In FY 2000, 221 applications, which requested \$2,147,000, were received under the Statewide Resource Concerns portion of EQIP. Some 177 applications, obligating \$1,450,000, were accepted. In the 22 Geographic Priority Areas in the State, 224 applications requesting \$3,443,000 were received from interested land owners. A total of 160 applications obligating \$2,750,000 were accepted.

There were approximately 1,200 active EQIP contracts in NM in FY 2000. Nearly \$9.5 million of financial assistance is obligated through these contracts.

## Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)

WHIP is a voluntary program that helps landowners develop and improve wildlife habitat on private lands for these priorities in New Mexico: mixed grass/shrub, forest/shrub (for mule deer), riparian areas, wetlands, endangered species, and sources of wildlife water.

Since 1998, some \$800,000 has been expended. There are currently 110 active contracts, including one with the Santa Ana Pueblo for about \$80,000 for work along the Rio Jemez.

## Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)

In FY 2000, there were 2,560 active contracts on 593,000 acres. These lands have been returned to permanent cover to control soil erosion and improve water quality and wildlife habitat.

## Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)

The WRP offers landowners a voluntary land-retirement option to restore or protect wetlands with either a permanent easement, a 30-year easement, or restoration cost-share agreement.

One permanent easement has been established in Sierra County at a cost of about \$210,000, and restoration activities are underway. One application is currently on hand for a permanent easement in San Miguel County with an estimated cost of \$12,000.

### NRCS Mission

To provide leadership in a partnership effort to help people conserve, improve, and sustain our natural resources and environment.

### NRCS Vision

A Productive Nation in Harmony with a Quality Environment

## Acequia Design and Construction

The NRCS Irrigation Assistance Unit and field staff assisted staff in the planning, design, and construction inspection on 59 acequia projects in 2000 at a construction cost of \$6.9 million. Currently, the agency has requests for technical assistance on 96 additional projects with a construction cost of \$7.5 million. Technical assistance funding is a cooperative effort of NRCS and the Office of the State Engineer.

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